

**ABSTRACT**

A protocol agent (135, 160) for a broadband communication network accommodates data that is provided using different protocols. Data is received from 5 protocol handlers (130, 165) at a client (115) or server (105). An identifier (565, 682) is attached (240, 315) to the data (570, 684), to identify the protocol thereof, whether encoding was applied and, if so, which type, and whether encryption/signing was applied and, if 10 so, which type. The data with the attached identifier is communicated, e.g., from a client (115) to a server (105), or from a server (105) to a client (115). Available communication paths include one-way, e.g., broadcast or multicast (462, 465, 470), or dedicated 15 upstream path (475), and two-way, e.g., an interactive path such as a computer network or telephone link (485) using TCP or UDP, or a cable television upstream path (480). At the receiving end, the protocol identifier (565, 682) is filtered (215, 340) to apply decryption/signature verification, and/or decoding, and 20 to forward the data to an appropriate counterpart protocol handler (130, 165).